Review: BatWing

by Kevin M. Savetz

IMG Rating: 1.1.1

Type	GamePad
Publisher	MACE Group (800/644-1132)
Retail Price	$49.95
Street Price	$40.00
Requires	Mac with ADB port
Protection	None

Archival reconstruction from the original Inside Mac Games electronic magazine. Text, styling cues, and artwork were extracted from the original Macintosh resources; the flowing PDF layout is new. Source: Inside Mac Games, April 1995.

Winging its way to your Mac, the MacALLY Batwing game controller may change the way you play your favorite games. The Batwing is an interesting twist on the standard joystick - combining an eight-way control pad, seven distinct fire buttons, and a unique design.

Bat out of Hell. It's shape is betrayed by its name, for indeed the Batwing is shaped somewhat like a bat wing. Or, maybe it's more like the whole bat. Although the shape is a bit hard to describe, its setup is similar to the controls of the original Nintendo Entertainment system - control pad on the left, firing buttons on the right. Additional firing buttons are on the top and back of the unit, giving the game-player a lot of control over where his fingers go, as well as an obtuse number of assignable fire buttons. The unit is light and comfortable to hold.

The Batwing gamepad includes software which allows you to customize the way the unit interacts with each of your games. The software is a bit funky, but once you get the hang of it, it's easy enough to customize the controls for every game you've got. The software comes preconfigured for dozens of games, but you'll want to tweak the default setups to your preferred settings before playing the first time. For instance, if you prefer using the gamepad's rear fire buttons to the ones on the right, you can switch that.

The software allows the pad's seven triggers to emulate any keystroke (or combination of up to four keystrokes) or a mouse click. The control pad can emulate mouse movements or keystroke. In addition, you can set the software to "press" a key once, twice or continuously when you press a trigger. Playing Maelstrom with the gamepad is a joy - the gamepad fires at least twice as fast as I can using the keyboard, and all you need to do is hold down a button rather than repeatedly jamming your poor phalanges. The result is lightning-fast firing that borders on cheating — but who cares? The gamepad is fun to use, and will certainly increase your scores in keyboard-based shoot-'em-ups.

Thumb operated controller with 4/8 direction cursor movement
2 programable forward placed fire buttons
Mouse/BatWing control switch
1 programable control button
Player setting switch
4 programable buttons for customized game control

Original artwork embedded with this review.

The Batwing works very well as a keyboard substitute for games that require keyboard input, such as Maelstrom. Defender (by Digital Eclipse) which has so many keyboard commands as to make it all but unplayable, is much, much more enjoyable with the gamepad. Unfortunately, the Batwing doesn't do justice to games that require mouse input. Although it can emulate a mouse, the Batwing only moves at one speed. Although that speed is customizable with the software, there's no way to move quickly and also be able to move with slow, precise control within the same game. A game like Oxyd is impossible with the Batwing. For the same reasons, the Batwing makes a lousy mouse substitute.

The first review unit I received was, well, a bit batty, After my computer was on for a while, the cursor would meander off in a random direction and could not be persuaded to act civilized by anything short of a reboot. After this happened three or four times, I received another unit, which works properly. I wouldn't even mention the defective unit, save this problem: nowhere in the manual or on the product box is the company's address, phone number or e-mail address. In fact, there's no mention of a warranty at all. Once I got hold of the company (with the assistance of Inside Mac Games) the folks at MacALLY were helpful and quickly replaced the gamepad. But getting there was more than half the battle.

Although I'm not left-handed, I wonder how left-handers will feel about Batwing. The control pad is always on the left, the firing buttons are on the right. If you don't like it that way, tough.

POW! VROOOM! If you have two Batwings, you can plug them both in for two-player action. Each unit comes with an ADB-splitter which lets you plug two devices into your computer's ADB port. This is a must if you're computer only has one of those ports. On the down side, the Batwing's 2.5-foot cord is not quite long enough. It barely reaches comfortably around the back of my Mac, across the desk and into my hands. You may find a ADB extender cable a worthwhile investment.

Pros

- Great for keyboard-based games
- Customizable software
- Comfortable feel

Cons

- No warranty information
- Short cord